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Burt challenged on work as reporter

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Richard Burt, nominated to be assistant secretary of state for Europe, was questioned closely Wednesday by a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee who was concerned Burt had revealed U.S. secrets.

Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., said his questions were not meant to hold up Burt's nomination, but said he wanted to express concern about an article Burt wrote while working for The New York Times in 1979.

It discussed a new U.S. method of detecting Soviet missile tests through Norway to replace the monitoring stations the United States lost in Iran.

Helms, who said Sen. Barry Goldwater, R-Ariz., shared his concern, said the story upset the Norwegians and then questioned how that would affect Burt's new role as the top U.S. official for European policy.

Democrats Joseph Biden of Delaware and Claiborne Pell of Rhode Island defended Burt. Pell is the committee's ranking Democrat.

Biden said the Senate might as well make a law prohibiting any journalist from holding a government position. "I hope we don't create a dangerous precedent," said Biden when commenting on Helms' request.

Pell said that if anyone was to blame in case of leaks of classified information, it is the officials who do the leaking and not the journalists who receive the information.

Helms asked committee chairman Charles Percy, R-Ill., to ask the Senate Intelligence Committee, headed by Goldwater, to prepare what he called a "damage assessment" report on Burt's newspaper story.

Burt said he alone made the decision to write the story and that he had not been discouraged by official sources from writing it.

He said he met with CIA Director Stansfield Turner after his story was published because of the concern it caused within the U.S. intelligence community. He gave further details on that meeting.

Burt would not specifically say whether he got the information from administration officials. He said he preferred to refer to them as "individuals," but acknowledged it was someone with an "official capacity."